

# ADULT AND CONTINUING EDUCATION STUDENTS' SUCCESS AND INTERGENERATIONAL SOCIO-ECONOMIC MOBILITY IN ERA OF RAPID GLOBAL TECHNOLOGY

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*ABSTRACT:* We are now in a knowledge-based age and economy. Through this new era, we have seen the ascension of socioeconomic globalization, or the interconnectedness of the world economies. The vast reach of globalization and technology have had both positive and negative effects on adult, continuing, and postsecondary education. For instance, college access is at an all-time high (Kenworthy and Marx, 2017) as globalization and technology have revolutionized access to education, yet, there are still ever-growing disparities in wealth and socioeconomic mobility across the globe (Atkinson and Lakner, 2013). In response to this, this paper suggests the theories of Human Capital, Resilience, Family Systems, and Humanistic Adult Learning can be combined to make a holistic integrative model. The researchers of this paper have hypothesized that this integrative model is profoundly relevant and incorporate foundational elements that adult, continuing, postsecondary education students ought to master to achieve sustainable intergenerational socioeconomic mobility; and therefore, help combat the negative effects (implicit and explicit) of globalization and technology (Bastedo, Altbach, & Gumport, 2016) (Doménech-Betoret, Abellán-Roselló, and Gómez-Artiga, A. 2017).

*Keywords:* socioeconomics, globalization, adult education, adult learning, integrative model, achievement

The world and the societies that encompass it have changed and evolved over the last few thousand years that humans of these societies have been the top species. Humans have existed in many types of basic need driven (food, shelter, water, connection) societies and cultures. We were a hunter-gather society until the Neolithic revolution. This revolution has happened many times throughout the world. The Western world took the lead in the next revolution, which was the industrial revolution. We still had and have an agrarian-based society, but the dominance of industry was an unequal force to the non-mechanized ways of agrarian endeavors (Bastedo, Altbach, & Gumport, 2016). The industry-based societies of our contemporary age have ruled supreme in every facet of life until computers and technology came trickling through, trickling through like the flooding of a dam. There is no going back, and the world will now never be the same because of the leaps and bounds that technology, more specifically, personal computers and the World Wide Web have altered and reconstructed the social fabric for how we live (Bastedo, Altbach, & Gumport, 2016).

Moreover, we are now in a knowledge-based age and economy. Through this new era, we have seen the ascension of socioeconomic globalization, or the interconnectedness of the world economies. The vast reach of globalization and technology have had both positive and negative effects on, adult, continuing, and postsecondary education. For instance; Kenworthy and Marx (2017) convey that, college access is at all-time high as globalization and technology have revolutionized access to education, however, there are still ever-growing disparities in wealth and socioeconomic mobility across the globe (Atkinson & Lakner, 2013). According to Covarrubias and Fryberg (2014) adult, continuing, and postsecondary education can be the easiest and chief determinants of

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vertical upward mobility. Even though, there have always been those that have and those that do not. What is interesting about the current literature on this topic is the misalignment of mass opportunity for international socioeconomic mobility and access to education around the world. Yet, there is an acceleration of the gap between the privileged and the marginalized (Kenworthy & Marx, 2017).

This paper addresses four universal factors that the researchers of this paper have hypothesized to be the most relevant and foundational for adult learners to master in order to achieve sustainable intergenerational socioeconomic mobility, and therefore help combat the negative implicit and explicit affects of globalization and technology. It is the opinion of the researchers that the vertical trajectory of an individual's socioeconomic and cultural status ought to be a goal of all adult and higher education professionals (Covarrubias and Fryberg, 2014). In that, education; especially adult, continuing, and postsecondary education, can be one of the greatest catalysts for positive systemic change in regard to a society's (particularly the working and middle classes) ability to progress forward in a positive manner. This happens by allowing greater opportunity for sustainable intergenerational socioeconomic mobility on an individual, family, community, national and global scale (Covarrubias and Fryberg 2014) (Doménech-Betoret, Abellán-Roselló, & Gómez-Artiga, 2017).

### **The Exclusivity of Education**

Throughout human history, there has always been a hierarchy of class, status, and ruling power. As Merriam, Courtenay, and Cervero (2006) assert, there is an existence of the mythic norm (p. 193) which is a term to describe who actually possesses the highest level of privilege and power, especially in the Western world, this is a person who is described by Merriam et. al., (2006), "white, thin, male, young, heterosexual, Christian and financially secure (p. 193)." The universal glass-ceiling and the mythic norm oppresses all that fall outside of this narrow category. Plato believed, education is the greatest resource for rescuing members of a society from a broken system and corrupt leaders (Merriam et. al., 2006). This assertion echoes throughout contemporary society today. Advancement in educational philosophies has been a continuous and ongoing pursuit and a justified pursuit as well. This pursuit for advancement and growth usually comes out of societal discontentment of the status quo. Thus, research queries, why is Intergenerational Socioeconomic Mobility important?

In light of, that for many centuries, colleges and other forms of education were accessible by only aristocratic classes, or a variation of the mythic norm aforementioned. This exclusivity was seen by many progressive thinkers to be a hindrance to a civilized nation's society and culture, as well as, a hindrance to the growth of entirety of the human race. Hensley, Galiee-Belfer, and Lee (2013) highlight recorded views of the United States' founding father, principle author of the Declaration of Independence, and the third president; Thomas Jefferson. Jefferson argued that a wide-spread availability of education would have an equalizing role on society and help curtail power, influence, and resources that historically are held at the top. This in Jefferson's era, was the model of the aristocrat hierarchies, principles, and cast systems of Europe, Asia, and Latin America

(Hensley; Galiee-Belfer, & Lee 2013). Namely, throughout history, education has been a privilege for those who were born in the correct socioeconomic class or station (Hensley; Galiee-Belfer, & Lee 2013). This is what is termed as the socioeconomic status quo. Intergenerational socioeconomic mobility is the antidote to this complacency of balance.

According to Beltz, (2012) America is divided. As is the case with many industrialized nations around the world today (Maskin, 2015). Income and social inequalities have grown to levels that have not been seen since before the United States' Great Depression of the early 1900's (Beltz, 2012). It is now a widely known fact that there exists a 1 percent class in the United States that hold more wealth than the bottom 90 percent (Karabarounis & Neiman, 2013). This is in America, one of the wealthiest nations on earth. When one thinks about this, it seems that there is a balance issue or error somewhere. Beltz, 2012 points out, that the stagnation in wealth achievement by the bottom 90 percent is due to wage stagnation with rising income levels being applied to only those at the top (the 1 percent class). All the while the costs for goods and services and other essentials like - education, food, housing, education, childcare, health care, transportation etc. increases (Karabarounis & Neiman, 2013) (Hensley; Galiee-Belfer, & Lee 2013).

Thus, to combat this negative effect of globalization and imbalance of power while furthering support of intergenerational socioeconomic mobility for the many, and not just the few. Universities and educational systems around the world must promote the ideology that education is for everyone, no matter what socioeconomic class, station, or stage (age) in life the person has achieved (Wiggins, 2011). This paper reasons that there are four universal factors based on theories that are derived from the disciplines of; adult learning, welfare economics, psychology, counseling, sociology, and political science theory; when combined in an integrative model, these theories give students the best tools to be active, conscientious, educated, global citizens, and not just degree holding ones that go along with the status quo.

The same status quo that serves the 1 percent and deepens the ravine of wealth and overall quality of life disparities (Merriam et. al., 2006). The hypothesis in this paper is that these four universal factors or the lack thereof, have a relationship with positive outcomes of and can aid in the predication of sustainable intergenerational socioeconomic mobility of adult, continuing and postsecondary higher education students. It is the use of this integrative model that is hypothesized to be a strong predictor of a more balanced, holistic, and sustainable intergenerational socioeconomic mobilization for the many and not just a few. Everyone who seeks ought to be able to attain the good life, whatever that may be. The integrative model combines factors that strive to touch upon each element of the human condition, this is done through a systemic eudemonistic lens or worldview of the researchers. This integrative model can be applied to adult, continuing, and postsecondary populations across educational settings throughout the globe. A curriculum that integrates the components of this integrative model could be constructed and applied to the aforementioned populations. Such courses that offer similar or parallel elements and ideologies are beginning to be seen at elite universities in the U.S. (Northwestern, Yale, Georgia State) (Moore, 2009).

Furthermore, intergenerational socioeconomic mobility in current literature holds many definitions. For this paper's purposes, this phenomenon is being defined as the vertical mobility of an individual in the contexts of his/her education attainment level, cultural awareness and knowledge, healthy interpersonal relationships (low-divorce rates, no familial emotional cut-off's) (Bowen, 1972), access to quality health care, socioeconomic status (purchasing power, leisure/recreation). This intergenerational upward shift is usually compared from one-generation to the next, or from parent to child mobility (Becker and Tomes, 1979). There is also relative and structural mobility which defines mobility on a group or societal sense, as well as, downward intergenerational socioeconomic mobility. For this research paper's purpose; we will be using the framework of individual (adult, continuing, postsecondary education students) vertical intergenerational socioeconomic mobility (Becker and Tomes, 1996).

### **Human Capital, Resilience, Systems, and Humanistic Integration Theory**

In addition, this paper looks further into this phenomenon in order to include a more holistic lens of what it is to really achieve sustainable intergenerational socioeconomic mobility. The researchers assert that the four aforementioned theories, when combined in an integrative model, can be universally and globally applied. This model may also be able to combat capitalist globalization forces that look to cheapen education. For-profit Education Corporations, Degree Mills tend to use education and educational technology as a weapon of economic or class warfare. Examples include yellow journalism, cheap labor, wage stagnation, archaic educational mandates of the P-12 school systems (Kenworthy & Marx, 2017), and to keep the masses in the U.S. and abroad impoverished (1 percent of the population owns more than the bottom 90 percent) (Merriam et. al., 2006).

In response to this, the theories of Human Capital, Resilience, Family Systems, and Humanistic Adult Learning can be combined to make a holistic integrative model. These theories that represent the theoretical frameworks of Human Capital Theory (Becker & Tomes, 1979), Resilience (Garmezy, 1991), Family Systems (Bowen, 1972) and Humanistic Psychology (Maslow, 1970). These theories can be represented in an adult, continuing, and postsecondary curriculum (adult learners, traditional university students, first-generation college students, transfer students), particularly at the undergraduate level. All of these groups are enabled by varying extents of access privilege and ability to possess or execute the following concepts; Academic Motivation (AM), Resilience (R), Differentiation of Self (DoS), and Critical Thinking (CT). These four concepts are indicative of the four theoretical frameworks that when combined create a sustainable model to support and progress intergenerational socioeconomic mobility in holistic systemic sense, this holistic approach is one that considers the individual, family mental health, health of relationships, economic security, access to education and overall life satisfaction. As one course in the field at psychology that is now offered at Yale University, that is designed to touch on these concepts and is called - the good life (Shimer, 2018) (ISEM) (Becker & Tomes, 1994) (Moore, 2009).

## Human Capital Theory – Academic Motivation

First, the idea of intergenerational socioeconomic mobility can be summarized by Human Capital Theory. This theory is a foundational theory in welfare economics. While this theory has its roots in the U.S., the early human capital theorists (Becker & Tomes, 1979), saw its international potential with respect to less developed countries. Human Capital Theory (HCT) suggests that more educated individuals are more productive and will earn a higher income.

Therefore, they will continue to increase their socioeconomic status and achieve intergenerational socioeconomic mobility through education and vocational training. These phenomena can be found globally. The inclusion of this theoretical framework is due in that we must as educators understand and help our students understand where they are at in life and *why* they are pursuing their educational endeavors. Some may not know the answer, and some may have not done enough introspection of themselves to fully understand their true academic motivation (Moore, 2009). There are many psychometric assessments that can be disseminated that touch on many aspects of this integrative models and its respective theories that can help students identify a congruent vocational calling. For instance, educators can assess this by using validated psychometric instruments and psychosocial education curriculums that include but are not limited to Resilience Scale, Academic Motivation Scale, RAISEC, and Family Genograms etc.

### Resilience

Moving on, Resilience (Garmezy et al., 1991) is a term that is used to describe behaviors and emotional controls of an individual, as well as, and more importantly, the ability to bounce back or grow from trauma, disappointment, and failure. Resilience refers to the ability of people to achieve “good outcomes in spite of serious threats to adaptation or development” (Masten, 2001, p. 228). Resilience is not a fixed or innate trait, it can be strengthened and learned (Masten, 2001). Adult, Continuing, and other Postsecondary students can further develop of their own resilience by learning to be introspective into their own thoughts, emotions, and behaviors. Influences that enhance resilience in Adult, Continuing, and other Postsecondary students include social support, physical health, self-regulation (emotional, behavioral, mindfulness), cognitive flexibility (embracing a growth-mindset), and optimism (Howard, Dryden, & Johnson, 1999). The importance of making sure we as a society instill in one another resilience is for the greater good and not just the individual. (Hensley; Galiee-Belfer, & Lee 2013)

According to; Kena, Aud, Johnson, Wang, Zhang, Rathbun, Wilkinson-Flicker, and Kristapovich (2014) in 2013 the U.S., reported that the percentage of students finishing his/her bachelor’s degree in under six years was less sixty percent (Kena et al., 2014). (Bound et al., 2010; Snyder and Dillow, (2013) report that graduation and retention rates are even more in a decline for Black, Hispanic, First-Generation, And Low-Income students (Bound et. al., 2013). Indeed, many obstacles still affect achievement rates of these types of students. Students that may be traditional and continuing education students, especially those who come from marginalized backgrounds and other

underrepresented groups. Therefore, politicians, policy advocates, and researchers have strived to make significant efforts to combat the barriers to educational pursuits and degree completion, holistic wellness, and more important, mental health, is not fully considered.

Twenge, Freeman, Campbell, 2010 conclude the prevalence of mental health problems among adult, continuing and postsecondary education students has increased steadily. Eiser, 2011; Gabriel, 2010; Schwartz & Kay, 2009 reports that these phenomena of more access to education does not make up for a lack of resilience in our student populations. Eiser et. al., 2009 declare this as “campus mental health crisis” (Eiser et. al., 2009). That is why it is essential to nurture the psychosocial and emotional elements of a student’s world. Thus, integrating this model as a worldview (or as a curriculum) can help deepen the understanding of the needs of the aforementioned student populations (Kena et al., 2014).

### **Family Systems Theory - Differentiation of Self**

According to Bowen (1972); Differentiation of self is the ability to differentiate between thoughts and feelings, and to decide between being guided by one's intellect or one's emotions. Bowen Family Systems/Intergenerational Family Therapy can and ought to be applied to undergraduate students’ curriculum. Within the integrative model this theoretical framework helps the students explore their own family of origin. This theory (Family Systems theory) centers on differentiation and the learned behaviors that individuals learn from their families of origin. Tools that would be used with this theory are; the three generational genograms, (a visual representative family map of the student’s family history - socioeconomic and psychosocial-cultural factors), and the identification of family patterns (Simon, 2003).

Additionally, exploring these concepts and working with a tool like the three generational family genograms (Bowen, 1978) is usually set aside for psychotherapeutic settings. It is the assertion of the researchers that using this tool with population of adult, continuing, and postsecondary education students would be highly beneficial as well. As we explore where we come from; we also can identify strengths, strengths that possibly were not identified before. Pursuing intergenerational socioeconomic mobility for the greater good can start with the individual, who in turn, has a positive effect on their own family, community, place of work, and so on and so forth. In essence, what is beneficial for one, is beneficial for all. It is not enough to make it to the top of the mountain if you do not help anyone else when you get there (Bowen, 1972).

### **Humanistic Perspective - Critical Thinking**

In order to know where we are going, we must know where we have been and who we are. It is the researchers’ assessment that all adult learners should engage, and engage often, in existentially questioning themselves and consistently practice deep reflection and introspection. It is at the core of our being and through our natural predispositions that help dictate how learning will occur for us (Williams & Ferrari, 2015). Humanism –

Humanistic Learning theory or broken down further – critical thinking. This component focuses on the inner person, the person's needs, desires, and wants and how these require attending to in any learning occurrence.

The founders of Humanism assert that the adult learner becomes more independent and self-directed, is internally motivated, and can use the experience as a resource for learning. Current research suggests the adult's capacity to grow, develop, learn, and participate in making decisions about their own educational journey is allowed when the student is attuned with Humanistic learning theory or Humanism. Humanism is referred to as the third force (Maslow, 1970); it stems from Humanistic Psychology and rejects both Behaviorism and Freudian Psychology. Originally Humanism was the brainchild of; and draws directly from the philosophical underpinnings of Humanistic Psychology (Maslow, 1970). Such underpinnings can be traced back to Aristotle, Plato & Epicurus etc. Conversely, it was not until the 1950's that Humanistic Psychologists Abraham Maslow and Carl Rogers firmly established the alternative perspective on human nature and the learning process, as well as, motivations/drives (Merriam & Bierema, 2014). This theory asserts that humans have a continuous and not a fixed potential for growth and development. That people are free to make choices and determine their own behavior, and therefore, can choose their own fate through the process of introspection and self-actualization (Merriam & Bierema, 2014).

Subsequently, Abraham Maslow stated that the goal for all learning was to begin the process of self-actualization, the process of self-actualization is synonymic with critical thinking. The integration of this model and the teaching of its components that embody humanistic adult learning theory and humanistic psychology, overall, promote an elevated level of critical thinking. This critical thinking according to Maslow and Rogers was the evolution of the human condition (Maslow, 1970).

In addition, to be able to think critically about one's self and the world in which we live, was for Carl Rogers what it meant to be a fully-functional human (Rogers, 1969). Likewise, Maslow's hierarchy of needs is the foundational concept behind Humanism. Maslow's famous triangle or pyramid of needs starts with our basic human needs and then transcends upwards with the more evolved needs of self-actualization. (Merriam & Bierema (2014) Humanism focuses on the holistic view of the whole person (i.e. adult learner) including everything from their mind, to their body, and spirit. This theory attempts to dig down to the core of the individual to discover and bring forth their innate potential to grow and develop. Humanism contends that people are free to make their own choices and determine their behavior or be a self-directed learner. With this freedom to choose learners have the ability to dictate their own educational trajectory and deeper still; their own place and meaning in life (Merriam & Bierema 2014) (Maslow & Roger, 1969).

## Technology and Globalization

We are now in a knowledge-based age and an information-dependent world economy. Seeing the effects of technology and globalization on students for the first time as it relates to the ability or barriers of entry to postsecondary and continuing education. To support intergenerational socioeconomic mobility, universities and other mechanisms that foster continuing education for adult learners must promote the use of educational technology for students around the globe and avoid the adverse effects that neo-political economic policies and adverse effects of globalization pose (Merriam & Bierema 2014).

In fact, postsecondary and continuing education paired with modern technology has increased human capital of countries across the globe, the unprecedented ability to obtain knowledge through technological means, and the ability to access postsecondary and continuing education courses, as well as connect with peers, mentors, and educators in a distance learning format, is at an all-time high (Kena et. al., 2014). Thus, a new age has allowed rural communities across the globe to engage academically, learn skills, and interpersonal competencies at a rate the world has never seen. However, even with this optimistic potential, technological advancements, and the connectedness that globalization brings, there are increasing disparities of wealth and intergenerational socioeconomic mobility on a regional, national, and global scale.

According to Merriam, Courtenay, and Cervero, (2006), in the US, research asserts, that

People's lives across throughout the world are increasingly subject to the powers of neoliberal economic policies of wealthy countries. Because of these policies, the lives of a very small minority have been made more comfortable, while the vast majority of people in the world have lost control over the economic, cultural, and political dimensions of their lives (p. 1).

In fact, students whose parents had completed high school, fifty-four percent enrolled in college immediately after graduation, while only thirty-six percent of students whose parents had less than a high school diploma immediately entered college (Merriam et. al., 2006). Thus, this is an indication of the stagnancy of the middle-class in the United States, how intergenerational socioeconomic mobility can be thwarted, even with all of the technological advancements and connectedness that globalization brings. Moreover, as globalization and technology have revolutionized access to education, there are ever-growing disparities in wealth and social mobility across the globe.

Merriam et al. (2006) assert that globalization and the market economy may not be the only cause for the imbalance that the world's societies are facing today, but it may absolutely be parallel to it. Never before has there been such a large gap in the equality of societal classes. The corporate VP's, shareholders, and elites reaping the huge monetary benefits, the socioeconomic status, and privilege that go along with the economic means that the "working poor" of such oligarch systems, provide them. Consequent of the above, they are literally maintaining their elite ruling status-quo off of the backs of the thousands they employ Merriam et. al., (2006) and Kena et. al., (2014). It

is our responsibility as educators to examine these phenomena, readjust educational policy, and develop approaches that circumvent unintended consequences of technology and globalization on postsecondary education and its' students (Merriam et. al., 2006).

### **Conclusion**

Overall, both formal and informal education have always been and must continue to be a crucial mechanism for the survival of human beings and societies. Consequently, it is imperative that we look at the system and challenge the contemporary status-quo that we see today in our political, economic, and educational systems. Similarly, Kasworm, Rose, and Ross-Gordon (2010) argued that healthy assimilation is imperative for what we would call a cross-cultural interdependent world. Research states that "Equal access is an important right, but it requires nuanced analysis and recognition of group differences, rather than practices and policies that assume all adult learners need and want the same opportunities" (p. 120). This is critical on university campuses. It is not enough to have a diverse student body to fill seats and collect tuition or fill a mandated diversity quota. Institutions and educators ought to seek the highest excellence and diverse experience from all their students (Kasworm et. al., 2010). Encouraging them to explore their own cultural roots and communities, while helping them feel like they belong, and that they have every right to achieve academic and educational success.

Therefore, learning institutions around the world must do much more to help with the complexity of the biopsychosocial and socioeconomic issues that underrepresented students have dealt with, are dealing with, and through higher education are attempting to overcome (Covarrubias, Romero, & Trivelli 2014). For centuries, postsecondary education and other forms of formal higher education means were only accessible by wealthy European, and sometimes land holding and or aristocratic males. This has changed drastically over the past century.

However, there remains room for much growth and mindfulness in terms of the large disparity of resources that still exists and is widening, even with the progress of a more educated society. As previously stated, unequal opportunities and barriers to access to higher education have always existed. Even though, for millions of students on every continent of the globe, educational formal and informal opportunities are more prevalent than a decade before. Indeed, despite the issues of inequality, and marginalization there is hope. In fact, contemporary access has been unprecedented for many individuals whom a hundred years ago, would have never been able to attend a college or university or continue any form of education. Despite more access, that is not where the effort sojourns.

To be sure, If higher educational institutions are to remain leaders of research and catalysts for positive systemic societal change, the institutions and all its administrators, faculty, and community members must do more to make sure that all populations can not only engage in learning but proceed in this world as self-actualized individuals who understand their purpose in their own life, but as well as their purpose and role within their own direct community and therefore the greater society of the world (Bui, 2002).

This vertical trajectory of an individual's socioeconomic and cultural status ought to be a goal of all adult and higher education professionals. In that education; especially postsecondary education, adult, and continuing education, can be one of the greatest catalysts for positive systemic change in regard to society's ability to progress in a positive manner by allowing greater opportunity for structural and intergenerational socioeconomic mobility on a global scale (UNESCO, 2015).

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